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March 9, 2005

The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

I am writing to request an update on the Department of Defense's plans to expand mental health services to servicemembers returning from combat zones.

A July 2004 *New England Journal of Medicine* study found that 17% of our troops in Iraq involved in ground combat suffer from major depression, generalized anxiety, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The study also found as few as 23% of those who revealed signs of a mental health disorder sought professional help due to barriers including the perception of stigma attached to mental health issues. Yet today, soldiers are only required to undergo one post-deployment health exam immediately upon return, which consists of little more than filling out a written questionnaire and fails to adequately screen for mental health problems.

As one who has long been concerned about the effects of PTSD on our troops, I am encouraged by the Department's decision in January to create a new clinical program that will require troops to receive screenings for PTSD and other psychological and social readjustment issues three to six months after their initial post-deployment health exam. With more than one million servicemembers having served in Iraq, the urgency of this matter cannot be overstated. I am concerned that the working group charged with developing the details of this new program has yet to complete its mission.

I thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Marty Meehan
House Armed Services Committee